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C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAKA 001828

SIPDIS

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TAGS: MASS MARR OVIP PGOV BG

SUBJECT: PACOM COMMANDER ADMIRAL FALLON'S VISIT TO
BANGLADESH

Classified By: DATT LTC BRIAN HEDRICK, REASONS PARA 1.4 B, D.

¶1. (U) Admiral William J. Fallon, Commander, U.S. Pacific Command, visited Bangladesh 16-17 April 2005. During the visit he had the opportunity to meet with Foreign Minister Morshed Khan; Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, Dr. Kamal Uddin Siddique; Chief of Army Staff, LTG Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury; and Principal Staff Officer, Armed Forces Division, MG A I M Reza Noor.

¶2. (C) Foreign Minister Morshed Khan welcomed close cooperation with U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) since 9/11 and expressed his commitment to working with the U.S. to institutionalize Democracy in Bangladesh and combat terrorism. He emphasized that PACOM engagement has supported Bangladesh capacity building and has enabled it to become one of the largest UN troop contributors. During the meeting, the Foreign Minister observed that trafficking in weapons, drugs and people from Burma had increased as Thailand has effectively increased enforcement along its border.

¶3. (C) The Foreign Minister described Bangladesh's role in the region as a &voice of moderation⁸ that is committed to de-nuclearization of South Asia. He then complained about India's heavy role in the region, especially the unfair negative picture India paints about extremism in Bangladesh and for their blocking progress on free trade in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). He stated that Bangladesh welcomed further support and discussion on civic action capacity building and support for counter terrorism, stating that the Bangladesh Government took the extremist threat very seriously and was taking concrete steps to curb it.

¶4. (C) Dr. Kamal Siddique, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, discounted the influence of extremist Islam in Bangladesh and claimed that Bangladeshis were &religious, but hate extremists.⁸ He stated that government efforts to control the madrassas were being supported by international donors and that further efforts to change the economic and social conditions that support terrorists had to be implemented. Dr. Siddique also stated that even though the Intelligence Services were sharing information with the U.S., they still lacked adequate training and equipment, and were weak and ineffective. He expressed a desire for deeper cooperation and sharing between Bangladesh and the U.S. He then stated that the Prime Minister wants to take tougher measures to curb extremism and improve the economy, but is going to wait until after the election in 2007 to implement the more &unpleasant actions.⁸ As an example, he stated that the government planned on divesting 51% of the national airline, Biman, if the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) won the next election.

¶5. (SBU) Meetings with the Chief of Army Staff and Principal Staff officer focused on specific military requirements including: simulator training equipment for the Army, the importance of UN participation and the shortage of armored personnel carriers (APC) that has hampered Bangladesh's ability to participate in UN missions. The Army Chief highlighted the importance of Army Troops at polling places during elections to ensure free and fair elections and underscored their role in nation-building and civic action.

¶6. (U) Admiral Fallon cleared this message.

THOMAS